

NRC Solutions from the Start toolkit

Tool 5 – Compendium of Examples

Compendium of Examples - A 'Solutions from the Start' approach in emergency response

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1. Asking “Why”: Water Infrastructure Repair – Libya

Context

In September 2023, the rains from Storm Daniel caused widespread flash flooding in northeastern Libya, affecting nearly 900,000 people in five provinces. The flooding caused damage to infrastructure including roads and water systems and severely disrupted the functioning of markets and supply chains. Access to clean drinking water was among the immediate highest priorities.

NRC’s initial emergency response plan set out a parallel approach: direct delivery of in-kind temporary assistance in the first three months (including temporary water supply), and early recovery activities focused on restoring services and rehabilitation. Direct delivery of emergency activities was given priority in the first month, due to high needs and access considerations in some locations.

“In an emergency response, it’s easy to fall back on what you already know – implementing activities that you know you can do well, do quickly – and report on!”

Problem analysis

In the city of Derna, water supply was cut off for more than 50% of the population due to the destruction of the main water pipeline. Multiple humanitarian organisations started water trucking into the city, and NRC considered starting the same. However, the volume of trucks created a new problem: traffic moving so slowly that water was taking up to 24 hours to deliver.

As direct delivery was a problem, NRC reconsidered its approach – and looked instead at *why* water was unavailable.¹ NRC started working with local authorities in Derna at a very early stage of the response to identify long term infrastructure needs and to identify solutions for storing water supply. The relevant authorities facilitated NRC’s access and provided technical support in conducting site assessments and identifying the section of the water network that needed immediate restoration.

Design

Joint technical assessment was conducted by NRC’s shelter team and the local water authorities. NRC’s team then worked on technical designs and BoQs, with the authorities providing building standards. The works were implemented by a contractor that NRC engaged using expedited procurement and tendering procedures due to the criticality of the intervention, supervised by NRC’s shelter team and the local water authorities. The intervention took around seven weeks from identifying the problem – and eliminated the need to use water trucking.

Successes and challenges

The complementary combination of some organisations doing direct delivery and NRC’s early re-orientation to understanding and then fixing the *systems* problem was key here. As a result,

¹ Useful for encouraging thinking about what root causes are, the [‘Five Whys Exercise’](#) is a tool from NRC’s Market Systems to analyse systems failure: a quick exercise of asking ‘why’, to move from the symptom to identifying possible root causes – and then to identify options for NRC to sustainably rather than temporarily fix the problem:

<https://norwegianrefugeecouncil.sharepoint.com/sites/Markets/SitePages/Step-3.aspx> (NRC internal resources).

direct delivery was done for the shortest possible time – maintaining access to safe drinking water while the water system was quickly restored.

The intervention was funded by a private foundation which also provided a great degree of flexibility and allowed NRC to decide on the type of infrastructure and intervention without any lengthy donor approval process. This significantly contributed to completing the project in a short time frame.

2. Emergency Response through Market Systems – Sudan’s Bakery Project

Problem analysis

In Darfur, faced with high food insecurity, NRC was confronted with a problem: how to improve access to food in locations where NRC had limited-to-no access, and where delivery via trucks for in-kind distributions was not a feasible option due to logistical and security issues. Further compounding the problem was the need for a blanket rather than household-level response, to avoid escalating pre-existing tensions between communities, and to maximise reach across a wide area experiencing high food insecurity.

NRC conducted a market systems analysis in its targeted locations, which concluded that trader networks were still operational, and identified some barriers that they were facing – confirming that a market-based approach would be possible.

Design

Aiming to improve food security, NRC utilised a combined market systems and cash modality, instead of distribution. This approach also meant that NRC was able to support local markets, aiming for the intervention to have a sustainable impact.

NRC supported the bakeries to expand their production capacity and to decrease prices. Business cash grants were given to the bakeries, calculated based on the amount of flour needed for production. This increased production capacity, and in exchange, the bakeries reduced the price of the bread they sold. Monitoring was conducted by community committees, to ensure the program was being delivered in a way that benefited all community members and identify anything going wrong.

Successes and challenges

One of the more important successes of the modality was market recovery – kickstarting markets and market chains in the area post-conflict, having a significant impact on recovery efforts. Bakeries re-opened and flour and oil trading routes started to recover – injecting cash into circulation, boosting supply chains, and sustaining local businesses. However, some of the bakeries supported during the project downscaled their production again after the subsidy period ended, or in some cases closed – a consequence of cash modalities being time-bound.

NRC had to accept some financial risk in choosing this approach. And, taking the risk to choose a modality that may not have worked, and had a less predictable immediate impact than delivery of in-kind assistance would have done.

3. Support to Local Civil Society Responders – Sudan

Problem analysis

In some areas in Sudan where NRC did not have access to do direct service delivery, the team looked at alternative options – and identified the need and opportunity to support local actors and the existing efforts of civil society first responders.

Design

NRC used a cash modality to support local responders, coupled with capacity strengthening for interested groups. This was initially through group cash transfers of up to 5,000 USD, and then later flexible mini-grants of up to 25,000 USD – aiming to be as flexible as possible in the types of group and initiatives that were funded. The intention was to support responses that were community-designed and for money to flow to support grassroots responses.

The selection of groups was intended to be as inclusive as possible, encompassing a wide range of actors such as community initiatives, youth and women’s groups providing assistance within their communities, as well as larger national organisations. The pre-requisites included the groups demonstrating their presence in communities, and that the initiative they proposed to NRC for funding had been discussed with community members. And, to have at least five people responsible for running the group, including a lead, secretary, and financial focal point, to be signatories and allow some accountability checks.

The types of initiatives funded were very varied – based what groups assessed needs and priorities to be in their communities. These included: food baskets, communal kitchens, menstrual hygiene kits, kits for older people, care for people with injuries, repairs for structures displaced people were staying in, solar power for learning institutions, and rehabilitation of market stands for women. The approach meant that NRC was able to support smaller interventions that usually wouldn’t be included in its main programming

Complementing the cash support, NRC embedded capacity strengthening for organisations interested – focused on practical skills for accounting, M&E, and leadership in crisis.

Successes and challenges

A key success of the approach was fundamental to its design: the engagement of, and support to, local responders – and the increase in agency to communities that this enabled.

Other humanitarian actors as well as NRC have provided support to Sudanese civil society responders, the cumulative result of which was a large increase in their capacity and reach. Some groups NRC supported subsequently pursued being formalised and were accessing larger funding pots to support their work. The approach also proved to be very cost-efficient in delivering assistance to communities.

There is also risk inherent in the approach. Disbursing funds to small groups in locations that NRC does not have consistent access to, and wanting these disbursements to be quick to be converted into actual assistance – without over-burdening the groups with paperwork beyond their capacities to complete – meant accepting and absorbing a level of financial and accountability risk. Accepting this risk was, however, worth it for NRC, with the model described as big success.

4. Avoiding Creating Barriers to Self-reliance: Shelter, HLP, Market-based Approach – Gaza

Context & problem analysis

In Gaza, NRC site management team staff members who were from the local community identified a problem for families with damaged housing: that if they moved away from their house to nearby displacement sites, they risked losing recognition of their land ownership. This issue was confirmed by NRC's ICLA team, who already had a good understanding of the HLP situation – both of community-recognised tenure verification mechanisms, and the implication of the destruction of the land registry.

Design

This analysis informed the design of NRC's shelter and HLP intervention for people with damaged and destroyed housing who were not displaced away from the area.

For the shelter aspect, NRC provided emergency shelter kits, which included locally available framing kits and sealing-off kits. This facilitated temporary shelter repair of damaged housing, rather than distributing tents as a default. Direct distribution of materials, using existing Framework Agreements, would have likely been the fastest option for getting shelter materials to families. However, access issues for bringing items into Gaza meant that this was not a viable option. Instead, NRC turned to using local markets – realising these were partially functional and could benefit from support in their recovery.

NRC technical teams worked with families to develop tailored BoQs, then acquired basic materials from local suppliers, and paid skilled labourers to do repair work, providing them a temporary income source.

For the HLP aspect – challenging without a functioning formal legal system – the ICLA team designed an approach to use community-recognised tenure verification mechanisms to help families prepare proof of ownership. This involved the preparation of documents for each family, employing community-based contingency workers, specifically as document preparers, to gather signatures needed from within the community, thereby validate occupancy and tenure claims through community verification.

Successes and challenges

Working in a highly insecure environment was a challenge, particularly in sustaining market access, as was donor acceptance of using local markets for the intervention (although, eventually, still being a successful approach). The use of temporary shelter materials caused some dissatisfaction among some families, preferring materials that could be used to rebuild their homes.

The intervention was not designed to be a full fix for families with destroyed housing: shelter materials used were temporary, and the conflict situation remained precarious. But the design of NRC's approach was intended to not *increase* barriers to self-reliance – supporting families to remain on their land and retain recognition of their ownership.

5. Combining Individual and Systems-level ICLA Support – Mozambique

Context & problem analysis

In 2018, the Government of Mozambique introduced a new digital system to manage civil registration. However, all pre-2018 records remained in physical books stored in district registries. In Cabo Delgado, several civil registry offices were partially or completely destroyed during the conflict that started in 2017 – meaning that birth records were destroyed. Record reconstruction procedures took several days per person, and requests overwhelmed the local authorities. At the same time, some people in displacement-affected areas had never been registered. Both groups were facing major barriers to exercising basic rights and accessing services.

Design

NRC's ICLA programme decided to tackle legal identity in Cabo Delgado on two tracks. The first, **supporting 'reconstruction'² and first-time issuance of birth certificates for conflict-affected populations**. This was done through mobilising communities and sharing information on process, supporting transport and basic operational costs, advocating to ensure vulnerable individuals were not excluded, and supporting mobile civil registration brigades to travel to displacement sites, host communities, and return areas to carry out first-time registrations for children and adults.

And in parallel, **a systems-level intervention: a pilot to digitise pre-2018 birth records**, both surviving and reconstructed files, and integrate them in the government's system. NRC-supported personnel worked in digitisation teams with government staff, mapping, cleaning, and clarifying files, and then creating digital records. NRC provided equipment, technical advice, and logistical support, while government services retained ownership and control over the content of the records and the system

The intention was to **avoid remaining in a permanent "emergency 'reconstruction' mode"**, and instead to permanently safeguard identity data so that conflict-affected people could access documentation from any civil registry office in the country.

Successes and challenges

For individuals, people who lost their documents have been able to reconstruct their records, and others now hold a birth certificate for the first time. This is a gateway to enrol in school, sit exams, access health services, register for social protection, open bank/mobile wallet accounts, or prove age, identity, and nationality in other administrative procedures.

For civil registration services, the digitised pre-2018 records have reduced the need for repeated reconstruction of the same cases. Processing times for some types of requests have shortened, and staff report feeling more confident that their work is not at risk of being undone by a fire, flood, or attack.

² 'Reconstruction' refers to the term used by the government's civil registry offices for the process of issuing civil documents that existed before, but for which there is no longer a record of.

This illustrates how a ‘Solutions from the Start’ approach can be applied to legal identity work in an emergency context. NRC and the Cabo Delgado authorities did not treat documentation only as a short-term humanitarian issue or as a long-term development reform: they **combined immediate support to conflict-affected individuals with structural changes to how records are preserved**. Working on both the “front end” (people obtaining or recovering documents) and the “back end” (security and permanence of the records), the programme has **reduced future dependency on ad-hoc support and repeated reconstruction**.

For more information, see [internal NRC case study ‘Protecting Legal Identity through Reconstruction and Digitisation of Birth Records’, 15 December 2025](#).

6. Supporting Local Emergency Response – Human Mobility Hub, Egypt

Problem analysis

NRC’s Human Mobility Hub (HMH) launched in 2023 in North Africa, with a focus on complex mixed migration in Egypt and Tunisia. Rather than conducting direct implementation, NRC partners and collaborates with local organisations, host communities, and people on the move – to support a localised response, focused on legal, education, and emergency programming.

In April 2023, the Sudan crisis emerged, followed in October by the crisis in Gaza. Since then (up to the end of 2025), an estimated 1.5 million Sudanese refugees have entered Egypt, in addition to more than one million registered asylum seekers and around 150,000 Palestinians being stranded. These displaced people face severe barriers to registration, legal status, and basic services, leaving many at risk of detention, exploitation, and extreme vulnerability.

Design

By the time refugees started arriving in Egypt from Sudan, NRC had already established a network of partners. It was soon apparent that any response needed to be solutions-oriented, as the crises seemed unlikely to end quickly, and likely to result in prolonged displacement.

As **NRC never intended to do direct implementation, a ‘Solutions from the Start’ approach was embedded** in the response from the early days of planning: looking at how to use HMH’s model of partnership, with interventions co-designed and co-implemented with communities and local partners. NRC’s approach was to **support local identification of gaps – and then resource these**. NRC channels funding to local partners through both Project Implementation Agreements and Flexible Mini-Grants and accompanies all supported activities with targeted technical capacity-sharing initiatives.

The first line **ICLA** response has included development of information materials and awareness sessions for new arrivals, as well as support to facilitate access to vital life event documentation, refugee status, and residency. This followed a comprehensive analysis of legal barriers to solutions, including asylum laws and financial market engagement for displaced communities and Migrant- and Refugee-Led Organisations (MRLOs). For **education and youth**, work has focused on NRC’s Better Learning Programme – psychosocial support interventions with children and young adults who have been exposed to trauma, for both displaced and host communities, with the goal of supporting them to be able to resume learning. Interventions also included Cash for Education, support to community schools and infrastructure, and a teacher

training package designed to strengthen teachers' skills. In addition, NRC support youth-led organisation by strengthening their capacity to contribute to emergency response effort.

Complementing these, HMM's emergency response also included provision of basic items, based on partner-identified needs, as well as MPCA, and Cash for Protection.³ Plus, **support to local partners in developing and implementing tailored responses, and capacity-sharing** on Emergency Preparedness.

Successes and challenges

The 'Solutions from the Start' approach applied to NRC's emergency response was facilitated by the decision not to pursue direct implementation. This enabled engagement with local actors who already had first hand contextual knowledge of the opportunities and barriers in a country with a long history of integration and refugee hosting. This led NRC to focus on how best to support local partners and, in parallel, "*encouraged a culture of solutions seeking within the team, as we were never aiming to conduct a standard aid response*".

One challenge has been finding the right point for NRC to step back further – assessing when local partner capacity has reached a level of self-sufficiency and when NRC can shift towards a more systems-based approach to aid which can enable solutions. The HMM is exploring the ability to set up a Network of Legal Actors under a coordinated governance structure that could channel funds, engage with donors and duty bearers, and coordinate legal aid initiatives across countries.

7. Collaborative Partnerships with Local Actors in Emergency Response – Poland

Context

In February 2022, the conflict in Ukraine escalated, resulting in millions of refugees from Ukraine being displaced into Poland and beyond. Polish local and national authorities, along with civil society, mobilised a significant response quickly, both grassroots level and through national legislation. However, even in a high-income context, authorities and civil society actors became overwhelmed with the large-scale needs and lacked experience in managing large numbers of newly arrived refugees.

Design

NRC established operations in Poland in March 2022. Its response was quick and partner-led – using NRC's technical humanitarian expertise to support Polish local and national actors both programmatically and organisationally. Rather than defaulting to direct implementation, NRC aimed for "***collaboration with civil society rather than competition***", recognising that its value lay in amplifying local actors and building their systems. NRC set up a Country Office, with no Area Offices, and established Programme Implementation Agreements (PIAs) with a diverse range of partners. The partnership approach, and quick identification of capable local partners,

³ Through these interventions, NRC supported over 94,000 Sudan crisis-affected and over 16,000 Palestine crisis-affected people on the move and the communities that host them in Egypt between 2023 and the end of 2025.

enabled NRC's rapid scale-up to be quickly operational at a scale it would not have been achieve otherwise.

NRC's emergency response combined some short-term immediate assistance with activities designed to support refugees to be on a more sustainable pathway toward self-reliance:

- Education: NRC's Better Learning Programme delivered by partners in schools, and Education in Emergencies activities in mass accommodation centres.
- Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA): initially sector-wide blanket assistance to new arrivals, then later targeted MPCA to vulnerable households.
- ICLA: identified as a critical need, given the European Union and Polish legislative (Special Act and Temporary Protection) changes related to Ukrainian refugees' rights, and the subsequent need for refugees to access legal services to understand and navigate these.
- Multi-sector Transit Site operations: opening and managing the East Warsaw Train Station site from late March.⁴ Partner PCPM had capacity and staff but no previous experience managing a protection-sensitive site; NRC complemented with funding and technical expertise.⁵

NRC's **value-add in the partnership model** was in: 1) channelling funding that partners may not have been able to access otherwise; 2) technical expertise for large-scale humanitarian response; and 3) flexibility and strengthening organisational and programmatic capacities.

NRC made a planned exit from Poland in March 2025. The exit process included **preparedness planning** (with a 'Solutions from the Start' approach). NRC signed Emergency Preparedness Agreements (EPAs) with key partners outlining potential areas of programme and advocacy cooperation, contractual arrangements, and organisational support NRC would provide to a partner-led scale-up.⁶

Successes and challenges

The Poland example demonstrates a 'Solutions from the Start' approach where a collaborative partnership model was the starting point and activities were designed as pathways to self-reliance and exit wherever feasible. Over time, NRC's response combined short-term emergency assistance with more targeted support for longer-term integration. The exit model was transition rather than handover, as most partners already had complementary activities and funding sources before 2022.

Some challenges in partnering were experienced during the 2022 scale-up (in Moldova and Ukraine, as well as Poland). One issue in Poland across the entire sector was INGOs and local civil society organisations having quite different understandings of one another at the start, particularly on funding, reporting, and humanitarian standards.⁷ This helped catalyse NRC organisational changes to be able to work better with local actors, and the EPAs signed in Poland aim to clarify as much as possible in advance for scale-up during a first line response.

For more information, see [NRC, 'Three years of NRC in Poland', July 2025 \[internal\]](#).

⁴ Site Management and Protection from Violence activities, plus WASH, Shelter, and food security.

⁵ NRC took over direct implementation in October 2022, given competing priorities of PCPM.

⁶ Plus Non-Funded Cooperation Agreements and Better Learning Programme White Label and Licensing Agreements.

⁷ NGO Forum "Razem", *Grand Bargain Localization Commitments (Poland Case Study)*, June 2024

8. Sequenced and Integrated Drought Response – Somalia

Problem analysis

Five seasons of failed rains in Somalia created famine-like conditions in 2022, with 5 million people in acute food insecurity – compounding existing vulnerability from violence and displacement for many.⁸

Design⁹

As the drought emerged in 2021, NRC and other members of the BRCiS Consortium (Building Resilient Communities in Somalia) scaled up emergency response activities.¹⁰ Implemented in multiple districts, the response was designed to follow BRCiS's *sequenced, layered, and integrated* approach, with the aim to deliver **direct life-saving support to households, while also building resilience of Somali communities and underlying systems** – targeting especially vulnerable communities and households.

The response was phased, eventually in four parts, starting in early 2022. The **first three months comprised immediate response**: Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) and **subsidized water trucking**, procured and **led by the communities** (both short-term interventions to meet immediate needs). The approach was designed to build communities' skills to negotiate with water companies for emergency water procurement – aiming to be lifesaving, systems-supporting, and cost efficient as companies offer better prices to communities than to humanitarian actors and respond more quickly.

In the second phase after three months, small **water infrastructure projects** were implemented (e.g., on boreholes and drainage systems), plus health and nutrition services. In October 2022, **10 months after emergency response started, market-based activities were included**, supporting local food production and prevent collapse of local markets – working with financial service providers, agro-dealers, farmers, communities, and households. Where possible, the Consortium adopted a **market systems strengthening approach**. This included facilitating public-private partnerships (PPPs) for the extension of water services to new IDP settlements with negotiated tariffs for the duration of the drought and monitored by municipalities, and engaging with agro-dealers to provide training to households.

An example included kitchen gardens, where Consortium members partnered with agro-dealers to promote good practices of kitchen gardening in IDP settlements, therefore creating demand for farming inputs within newly displaced groups, as well as accelerating the production of nutritious food in short cycles that benefitted both nutrition and food security, increased the social capital of the groups of women involved as well as gave them options in terms of short term income generation.

⁸ LSHTM, UNICEF, and WHO, with the Federal Government of Somalia, FAO, and SIMAD University, Mogadishu. "From insight to action: Examining mortality in Somalia." March 2023 in NRC, 'Supporting Systems While Saving Lives' <https://stories.nrc.no/supporting-markets-while-saving-lives/index.html>

⁹ NRC, 'Supporting Systems While Saving Lives' <https://stories.nrc.no/supporting-markets-while-saving-lives/index.html>.

¹⁰ The BRCiS Consortium conducts both early action and emergency response activities. Its members are NRC, Action Against Hunger, Concern Worldwide, CESVI, GREDO, IRC, and Save the Children.

Successes and challenges

Evaluations of the consortium found that sustained effectiveness of the interventions was varied, although some families' reliance on coping strategies continued to decline after the project ended.

The model of market-based programming and its appropriateness in a drought with high mortality risks would have needed to be explained better to staff. While the Consortium's approaches aimed to be both life-sustaining and systems-supporting, they were technically challenging and perceived to take longer to learn how to conduct and implement than more familiar direct implementation activities, especially because there was little preparation time. Market-based programming should therefore be embedded in ERS plans earlier for partnerships to be identified and staff trained earlier on.

9. Response to Cyclical Displacement – IOM Mozambique

This example was shared and approved to be included in this toolkit courtesy by IOM as we collaborated with IOM for knowledge exchange in developing this toolkit. It stems from IOM's toolkit on Solutions from the Start that was developed at the end of 2025 as NRC worked on this toolkit and reflects IOM's CCCM response.

Context

Mozambique has cyclical displacement, caused by both disasters and conflict, which is sometimes short-term and sometimes protracted. When initially displaced, many people go first to temporary displacement sites and are often moved onwards by the government a few weeks to a few months later.

When displacement has been triggered by a disaster, if the affected area is assessed to be at continued risk the Government of Mozambique usually discourages people from returning, instead offering relocation sites for them to move to long-term. When displacement has been triggered by conflict, ordinarily people are encouraged to return once safe to do so.

Design

IOM's CCCM team has designed **multi-sectoral interventions** that can be implemented during the emergency phase. Their programming follows an **area-based approach**, working in displacement sites, areas of return, and relocation areas, with both displaced and host communities – centred on consultation with communities.

Activities with a Solutions from the Start approach include:

- **Community-led projects**, implemented immediately after an emergency. Priorities are established by community members and often focus on integration – going beyond basic needs. The choice of activities is commonly focused on livelihoods and income generation, often agricultural. Some projects have been accompanied by local authorities allocating land for agriculture soon after displacement, and others include host communities.
- **Creation of livelihood opportunities**. Activities include skills development, cash for work, support to small businesses, and small grants through cash-based interventions.

- **Support to authorities’ planning of relocation sites, to enable long-term safe resettlement.** IOM implements a combination of participatory settlement planning support to government authorities, and construction of housing and infrastructure. Both are guided by the community, with IOM CCCM teams working to understand (and incorporate and advocate for) community preferences and supporting visits to the potential relocation site. Externally, IOM also aims to bring other actors into the planning process, including coordination with development actors.

Successes and challenges

The community focus of CCCM combined with the ambition for interventions to support self-reliance and eventual solutions to displacement from early in an emergency has enabled IOM to build a set of ‘Solutions from the Start’ interventions that are rooted in community preferences. This is enhanced by IOM’s **integration of advocacy and programming** – with advocacy toward government authorities to help inform its decision-making giving voice to displaced people’s preferences that also inform IOM’s programme approach.